



PRESS RELEASE

House National Security Committee

Floyd D. Spence, Chairman

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STATEMENT OF CHAIRMAN FLOYD SPENCE (R-SC)

DURING THE FLOOR DEBATE ON

H.R. 2786, THEATER MISSILE DEFENSE IMPROVEMENT ACT OF 1998

H.R. 2786, the Theater Missile Defense Improvement Act of 1998, is intended to address the accelerated threat posed by recent theater ballistic missile developments around the world. North Korea has deployed the No Dong-1 missile. Iran's development of the Shahab-3 missile has proceeded rapidly, could be flight tested within the next year, and will have sufficient range to strike Turkey, Saudi Arabia and Israel.

The speed of these developments was unanticipated by the intelligence community and they warrant an immediate response. Our currently deployed missile defense systems were designed against older and slower threats and have only limited capabilities against this new generation of more lethal missiles. The steps taken in this bill will provide additional defensive capabilities for our troops and their dependents more quickly than is currently being planned.

The measures in this bill meet three important criteria. First, all are executable in the current fiscal year. It is therefore important for us to provide the funding and the authority to proceed in a timely manner. Second, all measures in this bill are consistent with planned missile defense systems and architectures. And third, this legislation is entirely consistent with current international agreements.

Mr. Weldon, who has spearheaded this effort with both patience and persistence, has been, quite frankly, ahead of both the Intelligence Community and the Department of Defense when it comes to the seriousness of this threat and the need for a rapid response. Likewise, Mr. Pickett and Mr. Spratt's efforts as cosponsors have strengthened this legislation and helped make it a strong bipartisan response to a serious threat.

The bill was approved unanimously by the National Security Committee, on a 45-0 vote. I commend all three of the bill's sponsors for their diligence. The Department of Defense believes that the bill's measures are important and constructive steps in any effort designed to address this rapidly evolving threat.

I once again commend Mr. Weldon, Mr. Pickett and Mr. Spratt for their leadership and their effort, express my strong support for this measure, and urge my colleagues' support as well.

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